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ABSTRACT

This book consists of 28 letters that child caregivers who work with children aged 3-6 can send to parents. Letters are organized into eight categories: (1) self-concept; (2) reading and writing readiness; (3) math readiness; (4) imaginative play; (5) motor development; (6) social development; (7) oral language and concept development; and (8) visual and auditory skills. For each of these categories, there are three to six perforated letters which can be removed, duplicated, and sent home to parents during the year. Each letter explains a child development concept and offers 5 to 10 activities for the child and parent to do together. The book provides special project ideas which are extensions of one or more ideas mentioned in the letters of each category. Finally, the book includes a certification of recognition for the child which is to be signed by both teacher and parent. (RJC)

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Letters

A GOOD YEAR BOOK

PS 017603

28 Ready-to-Duplicate Letters to Parents

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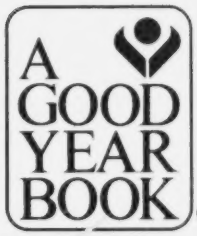
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Parent Letters for Early Learning

Anthony D. Fredericks
Mary F. Brigham

Scott, Foresman and Company
Glenview, Illinois London

To Mary Mastain
For all the energy, vitality, and enthusiasm
she shares with parents and educators.
—A.D.F.



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Preface

It has often been said that parents are a child's first and best teachers. Without question, parents provide children with the basic foundations on which successful learning experiences can be built. The support, encouragement, patience, and understanding of parents has a profound effect on both the academic and social development of children.

During the first five years of life, when children spend a majority of their time at home, more than 60 percent of their intellectual development takes place. It is during this time that children learn to talk, walk, eat by themselves, develop a sense of independence, and seek to explore the world around them. Children learn more at this time than at any other time in their lives. These foundational skills serve as the basis for the learning and social experiences a child encounters in the more formal atmosphere of the classroom.

This book has been designed to provide those working with children in nursery schools, preschools, day-care centers, and other child-care facilities with a selection of relevant and meaningful suggestions to share with parents. These activities, in the form of special letters sent home on a periodic basis, offer parents and other caregivers strategies they need to facilitate the total development of youngsters prior to their entrance into school. These activities are organized by the following topics:

A. Self-Concept: Helping the child develop a healthy self-image.

B. Reading/Writing Readiness: Developing the skills necessary to familiarize the child with the transfer of language from oral to written form, as well as those skills necessary for more formal reading instruction in school.

C. Math Readiness: Manipulating objects in various patterns and groupings to create a basis for mathematical understanding.

D. Imaginative Play: Using make-believe and imagination as the basis for self-discovery and appreciation of the creative process.

E. Motor Development: Helping children manipulate themselves and their environment through the development of fine and gross motor skills.

F. Social Development: Developing the skills and attributes children need to work, play, and live with others in a spirit of mutual cooperation and understanding.

G. Oral Language and Concept Development: Helping children develop the means to express themselves as well as understand others through listening and speaking; assisting children in developing an understanding of the relationships between the elements of the environment.

H. Visual/Auditory Skills: Promoting activities that help children receive, process, and respond to both visual and auditory information.

The need for mutual cooperation between parents, teachers, and children is vital in helping youngsters develop to the maximum of their potential. These letters, written in easy-to-understand language, help parents play an active role in the growth and development of their children. In addition, the letters provide you with an opportunity to communicate with parents on a regular basis—informing them of the importance of their involvement as well as offering them ideas to facilitate the total development of their children.

This book has been designed to serve as a convenient resource for you as you seek to involve parents in the education of their children. Used throughout the year, it can help ensure that everyone is working toward a common goal and that the best interests of all children are being provided for in an atmosphere of mutual trust, support, and encouragement.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to help you foster an active partnership with parents and provide the learning experiences they need to help their children grow and develop. All of the activities and projects are based on research-proven ideas that contribute to the academic and social growth of youngsters. Each letter includes a multitude of activities for children and parents to work on together in a relaxed and nonthreatening atmosphere. In short, each letter provides activities that promote a positive relationship between parents and children and at the same time help develop the skills necessary for future success, both in school and at home.

The book contains twenty-eight letters organized into eight categories. Within each category are three to six letters to be duplicated and sent home to parents throughout the year. There is no prescribed sequence for sending the letters home. You should feel free to send them home in the order in which they appear in the book or in any other order as dictated by the specific needs of individual children in your curriculum. You may choose to use the following procedures to distribute these letters.

1. Remove the Introductory Letter from the book and sign your name in the appropriate space. Duplicate enough copies of the letter for the number of children in your class, school, or play group. You may wish to have each child take a letter home to present to his or her parents or you may choose to hand a letter to each parent or guardian sometime during the first week of classes. In child-care centers, the letter may be placed in each child's "cubby." An alternate strategy would be to mail this initial letter home to parents, thus ensuring that each family receives and is notified about the upcoming letters and activities (although this would entail more clerical time and necessary postal expenses).

2. Periodically, you are encouraged to remove an additional letter from the book, sign your name in the appropriate space, duplicate it, and send it home. The age of the children and the dynamics of your class or school will help determine the best possible method for getting the letters into parents' hands.

3. Occasionally you may wish to pen an appropriate note or comment on the letters of selected children. This personalizes the letters even more and lets parents know that you are concerned and interested in their child's development.

4. We suggest that you establish one day (Monday or Thursday, for example) as "Letter Day." By sending the letters home on the same day each week, you notify both parents (and children) that these letters will be a regular part of your curriculum and should be expected.

5. Other communiqués from school or class should emphasize the importance of these letters. Continually remind parents about the letters, which are designed to help them provide the best learning environment possible for their children. You may also wish to point out that these letters are not intended as "homework" assignments but rather as opportunities for all members of the family to work and play together in an atmosphere of support and love.

6. Encourage parents to get in touch with you if they have any questions or concerns about any of the activities or projects mentioned in the letters. Let parents know that you are not trying to turn them into surrogate teachers but rather that you wish to offer them purposeful ideas that have some direct implications for the scholastic, social, and emotional growth of their children. From time to time, invite parents to come into your class or school to visit and share some of *their* ideas and thoughts as well. You may even wish to have parents share some of the projects and activities they and their children work on together.

Distribution Ideas

The following strategies offer you some alternate ideas for getting these letters into the hands of parents.

1. During a regularly scheduled "Open House" or "Welcome to School" session for parents at the beginning of the year, provide families with information on the letters—explain when they will be sent out and how they may be used. You may wish to have samples of some of the letters for review as well.

2. Many preschools, nursery schools, and day-care centers regularly distribute a newsletter for parents on current happenings and upcoming events. You may wish to photocopy and attach a letter to each of these newsletters. You may also choose to incorporate some of the information from the letters into your own newsletter.

3. Help children learn to take responsibility for getting these letters home by providing each youngster with a special mailbox in the classroom or at the entrance to the school. Clean, dry milk cartons glued together make excellent mailboxes when painted, decorated, and tagged with each child's name. Letters and other materials to be taken home can be placed in these boxes on a regular basis for children to collect and take to their parents.

4. From time to time you may wish to call parents and remind them about the letters. These phone calls have the added advantage of giving you a forum to discuss a specific child's growth in terms of some of the ideas presented in a particular letter or set of letters.

5. The principal or director of your school should be encouraged to mention the letters whenever possible. A personal letter from this individual or an occasional note throughout the year can help remind parents of the importance of these letters and of the suggestions they contain.

6. You may wish to establish a "telephone tree." For example, one parent can be asked to call two other parents and remind them about the letters. Each of those parents is then responsible for calling two other parents, and so on, until all parents have been contacted. A list of these parents and their phone numbers can be prepared early in the school year for sharing. Be sure to obtain parents' permission before distributing phone numbers!

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Parents,

This is a very special time in your child's life. He or she will be learning many new things--academic skills, how to get along with others, self-confidence, and motor skills. In fact, the years before your child enters a formal educational setting will be some of the most important and valuable to his or her development.

You play a major role in helping your child reach the maximum of his or her potential. Research in the area of child development points out that most of a child's intellectual development takes place before he or she enters a formal classroom. This means that children spend a great deal of time with their first, and perhaps most important, teachers--their parents. Indeed, as parents, your involvement in your child's learning experiences will have much to do with how well your child succeeds in school and in later life. By working together, I believe we can all help your child become the best person possible--socially, emotionally, and scholastically.

In order to help you provide the environment that will help you maximize your child's potential, I will be sending home prepared letters on a regular basis. These letters have been designed by experts in the field of child development and will offer you hints, ideas, strategies, and techniques designed to help you with your child's growth and development. Each letter will contain an assortment of projects and suggestions for you and your child to work on together, and will cover such areas as self-concept, reading/writing readiness, motor development, visual/auditory skills, and social development. The suggestions will not take up a lot of your time and can be easily incorporated into regular family activities. They should be a source of pleasure and success for your child. By using these ideas on a regular basis, you will be helping your child develop the skills necessary for successful social, emotional, and academic growth.

I'm looking forward to working with you this year as we help your child experience all the joys of learning. I stand ready to assist you in any way I can, so please feel free to get in touch with me at any time. Your participation and encouragement will be major contributions to your child's success this year!

Sincerely,

BUILDING A GOOD SELF-CONCEPT

Dear Parents,

Self-concept is defined as how a child feels about himself or herself. If a child feels good about who he or she is, then it is likely that he or she will feel sufficiently confident and want to try new experiences and make new discoveries. Much of what children learn about themselves comes from the support and encouragement received at home. As a parent, you provide your child with a good self-concept. I, on the other hand, will work with you in a partnership to help your child build a positive self-image.

Educational research documents the importance of self-concept on success in life. By constantly supporting your child, giving genuine praise at every opportunity, and helping your child feel good about who he or she is, you can help your child develop a valuable self-image--a determinant of lifelong success.

1. Give your child some genuine praise every day. Let your child know that you are aware of the many things he or she is learning and that you are constantly supporting those efforts. Praise can consist of a pleasant comment, a pat on the back, a big smile, or best of all, a hug. Make sure your child gets several every day.

2. Make a personal scrapbook with your child. Special photographs of your child, drawings, pictures of favorite foods, books, TV shows, people, and some other artifacts can be used for the scrapbook. Be sure to take some time regularly to add new things and to talk about them with your child.

3. Help your child share in some family decisions. These decisions can be very simple ones, such as where certain family members should sit at the dining table or what TV program to watch at a specific time. By providing your child with the opportunities to make these choices, and respecting his or her decisions, you are helping your child build a very positive self-image.

4. Be sure to take some time every day to talk with your child about some of the things he or she did or learned.

The dinner table may be the most useful location for this communication. It is very important that your child have a regular opportunity to share the day with you. Your attention and concern will be valuable in your child's development.

5. Every child is unique. Let your child know that he or she has some very special qualities that no one else has. You may want to talk about the color of his or her hair, the choice of clothing, or the kind manner in which he or she treats friends. Let your child know that there are many unique characteristics that make him or her special to you.

6. Don't compare your child with others. Although parents sometimes have a tendency to compare one child with another, this can be harmful to your child's self-image.

7. Be realistic in your expectations of your child, and be patient. Read magazines, books, and articles related to child development and parenting to assist you in understanding your child. Know that your child must learn over a period of time to pay attention, to follow rules, and to get along in a group. Praise your child for whatever he or she tries to do.

Sincerely,

A MIRROR OF GOOD FEELINGS

Dear Parents,

The feelings that your child develops in his or her younger years will have a dramatic effect on your child's life. Developing a positive self-image will allow your child to achieve and grow personally at maximal levels.

To a great extent, your child's self-image is a reflection of the feelings that you and significant others have communicated to your child. If you communicate to your child that you think your child is smart, good looking, and pleasant, that is the perception your child will have of himself or herself. If you communicate by your actions that your child never measures up in any way, your child will develop a negative self-image.

The messages that you send to your child must be constantly monitored. You need to be careful to have realistic expectations of your child based on your knowledge of child development. In addition, you need to be honest in dealing with your child, because your child will detect dishonesty when your facial expressions and body posture do not match what you have said.

In order to help your child develop a positive self-concept, some of the following suggestions will be helpful. Try them and share with others any that work well for you.

1. In disciplining your child, take care to indicate your disapproval of the behavior, not of your child. To accomplish this, avoid saying, "Becky, you were terrible at the store today." It would be better to say, "I don't like it when you fuss at the store if I don't buy you what you want. If you want to go with me, you'll have to learn not to fuss if I don't buy you what you want. Otherwise you can stay home with a sitter. You can let me know what you want to do the next time I am getting ready to go shopping."

2. Work with your spouse to be consistent in disciplining your child. When you make a rule, you need to stick to it. Believe it or not, children will appreciate it if you react to them in consistent ways, even if they do not always get their way.

3. Honor your child on special days such as birthdays, preschool graduation, or the day he or she learns to ride

a bicycle. Your child will really enjoy basking in feelings of importance and your approval.

4. Help your child to develop initiative by treating his or her suggestions as worthwhile and important. When a problem arises, ask your child how he or she thinks the problem should be resolved. If your child shows poor judgment, help your child think through the consequences of such a reaction.

5. Work with your child on "A Book About Me." You might include photographs of your child, pictures your child draws of his or her favorite toys, friends, pets, or books. The possibilities are endless!

Sincerely,

THE GIFT OF GOOD FEELINGS

Dear Parents,

One of the most precious gifts you can give your child is a positive self-image. A child with good feelings about himself or herself is much more likely to feel fulfilled socially, personally, and in the world of school and work than a child with a negative self-image. With a positive self-image, your child will face new situations with courage, deal with problems well, and be able to take risks.

All of us want these qualities for our children, but we do not always know how to encourage our children to develop in these ways. It is ironic that we attend classes for nearly everything we do except parenting. Yet parenting is a skill that needs refining for many of us. Parenting is one of life's most important responsibilities, so we need to educate ourselves on this subject. As parents, we need to talk to other parents about how to handle childrearing, we need to read related magazines and newspaper articles, and we need to participate in parenting classes sponsored by local agencies.

In addition to these opportunities, the following are some suggestions that will assist you in developing good parenting skills:

1. Realize that your child needs extra attention and support from you during times of stress. The birth of a new sister or brother, the first day of school, and changes in your work schedule are examples of these times of need. Spend some extra "quality" time with your child at these times and give your child "openings" to discuss his or her feelings about these changes.

2. Allow your child to "own" his or her feelings, whether you think your child handled a situation the best way or not. An example of this is the parent's reaction in this situation.

   Situation: Tommy is angry because Andy has taken one of his toys. Tommy punches Andy.

   Appropriate reaction: "Tommy, I know you do not like it when Andy takes your toys without asking. I understand that. But, please just tell him that you are upset when that happens. You might hurt him if you punch him again."

   Inappropriate reaction: "Tommy, go to your room. You

should not be angry with Andy when he takes your toys. After all, he is just a baby."

The difference in these two reactions is that as a result of the appropriate reaction, the child leaves the situation knowing that the parent understands his feelings but disagrees with his method of handling the situation. In the inappropriate reaction, the child simply leaves the situation more angry than he was before the parent intervened.

3. Provide your child with opportunities for developing responsibility. Simple household chores such as putting away toys and feeding pets provide your child with opportunities to assume responsibility. Praise your child profusely when he or she assumes responsibility. You might even make a chart for jobs and give your child a "smile" for each job he or she performs well daily.

4. Celebrate the skills your child develops by praising him or her for tying shoelaces, brushing teeth, becoming toilet-trained, combing hair, and other self-help skills. You might even help your child to make an "I Can" book in which your child draws pictures of all the things he or she has learned to do.

5. Provide your child with opportunities for socializing with other children in the neighborhood or in a preschool setting. Just as we must learn to parent well, children need to learn to interact with their peers. Children will be much happier if they feel that they have friends.

Sincerely,

COMPOSITION BEGINS EARLY

Dear Parents,

As your child grows and develops, one of the skills he or she will be learning is how to communicate with other people. Writing is one way people share information with each other, and it is an important skill to know. You can help your child develop an appreciation for writing, not by having him or her practice writing words or letters, but by helping your child develop an interest in and an appreciation for writing. Later, when your child is in a formal educational program, some of these skills will be fine-tuned.

1. Provide your child with a variety of writing and drawing materials, including chalk, crayons, markers, pencils, paper, and chalkboards. Encourage your child to write or draw anything he or she chooses.

2. Let your child observe as you write a shopping list, a letter to a friend, a note to another family member, a list of "to do's," or even a check. When children see the many ways of communicating through writing, they want to write as well.

3. Let your child tell you what his or her drawings and other artwork represent. Write labels or sentences to accompany the artwork, such as "Jimmy is washing the car." Read the labels or sentences to your child. Then let your child read them back to you.

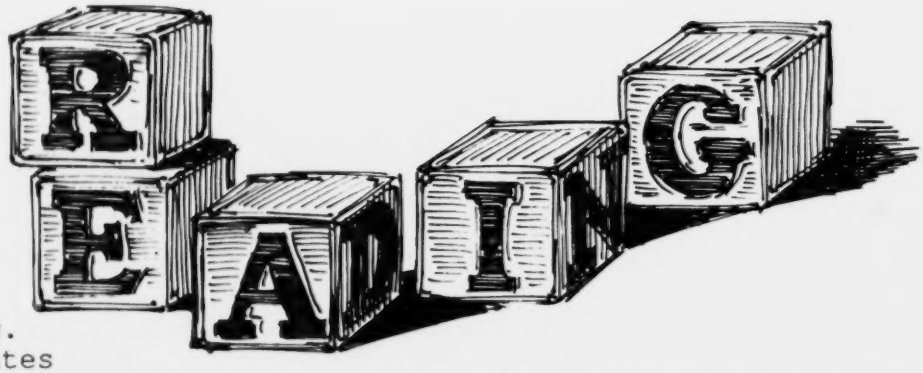
4. As your child begins to write, ask your child to tell you what he or she has written. You may find initially that your child's writing has no relationship to speech sounds. In fact, it may not resemble letters. Just accept what your child tells you about what he or she has

written. In that way, you will encourage your child to continue expressing his or her thoughts on paper. Gradually you will begin to see a relationship between speech sounds and your child's written expression, as your child leaves this "invented-spelling" stage to use traditional spellings of words. As a parent, realize that criticizing your child's writing will discourage him or her from wanting to write. Your support, encouragement, and interest in your child's writing is the best assistance you can give.

5. Make a book by stapling several pieces of paper together. Encourage your child to draw a picture on each page and to suggest a title for each, which you can record under each illustration. Be sure to display the finished product in a prominent place in the home library.

Sincerely,

ON THE READING ROAD



Dear Parents,

One of the most important subjects your child will encounter in school and at home is reading. Research indicates that the activities, games, and support children encounter at home contribute greatly to their reading success. You can certainly be a part of your child's reading growth by working with him or her on a variety of activities every day. Do these in an atmosphere of love, encouragement, and support--which are also important to success in any area.

1. With your child, look in several magazines for examples of colorful letters. Cut these out and paste them onto a sheet of cardboard. Your child may display these where he or she can enjoy them.

2. Choose a "Letter of the Day" and print it at the top of a large sheet of paper. With your child, identify objects in your home (or outdoors) that begin with that letter. Your child may wish to paste the pictures on the sheet and label them.

3. Write your child's name on a piece of paper. Help your child find other words in magazines that begin with the same letter as your child's name.

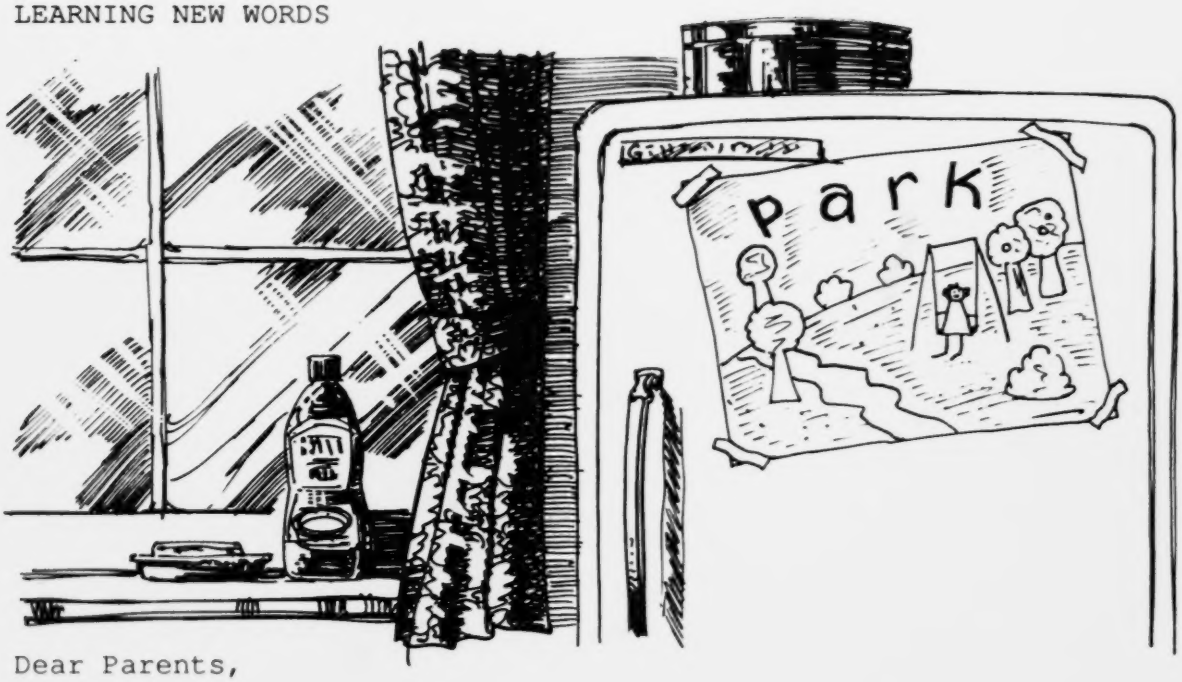
4. Play with your child using alphabet blocks, name some of the letters that appear on various blocks, and ask your child to repeat the letter names after you.

5. Take your child to the store when you go shopping. Point out specific letters on food packages and ask your child to locate other examples.

6. Make the shape of a selected letter from clay. Ask your child to trace the pattern with his or her finger and then make a similar example with another piece of clay.

Sincerely,

LEARNING NEW WORDS



Dear Parents,

You can help your child learn and appreciate new words. Be relaxed and informal as your child encounters new words. Here are some projects you and your child may enjoy working on together.

1. Write the name of an object in your home (chair, table, door, rug) on an index card. With your child, tape the card to the object it identifies. Each day let your child select one new object to label in this way.

2. You and your child can look through some magazines to discover that words look different when printing styles vary.

3. Use some new words when talking with your child. For example, "I saw a tiny ant on the sidewalk today" or "Let's go to the amusement park today." Write the new words on a card. Help your child understand that the words we speak are also words we can learn to read later.

4. As your child completes a picture or illustration, have him or her select one or two words that can be used as a title. Print these words on the picture for your child to display on the refrigerator or in his or her room.

5. Read to your child from a variety of sources. Newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, brochures, fliers, cereal boxes, cooking directions, and the like, can be used as reading material in addition to books. Help your child experience words in many different forms and many different ways.

Sincerely,

MATH READINESS

Dear Parents,

Using and understanding numbers will be an important skill for your child to learn when he or she enters school. You can help in this development by working with your child on a number of games and activities. At this stage, your child will learn best with "hands on" mathematical experiences in which he or she can actively participate. At first, concrete objects such as bottle caps, blocks, spoons, or paper clips should be used for counting, matching sets, adding, and subtracting. Later, your child will be ready for paper and pencil activities.

It is important to remember that you and your child should have fun as you work on these ideas. Keep the enthusiasm high and try not to turn your home into a classroom. Be constantly supportive of your child. Understanding numbers can be a difficult process for some children--one that needs a lot of practice. With a little imagination you can develop a whole variety of new games to play with your child. Here are some ideas to get you started.

1. Put your household "junk" to use to help your child understand sets. Let your child sort these objects by color, size, shape, function, and so on. Help your child count the number of objects in each set and compare the number of objects in sets. Introduce your child to the terms more, less, many, fewer, and equal as you compare sets.

2. Play "Copycat" with these objects. Move two of the objects to the side and have your child copy what you do. As you are doing this, say, "I have two pennies. Can you find two pennies, too?"

3. As you and your child travel together, talk about the numbers of some of the things you see. For example, "I see two red cars" or "I see three boys walking together." Help your child understand that many things come in groups.

4. As you work on tasks around the house (cooking, fixing a faucet, working in the garden),

provide your child with an opportunity to work with you. Be sure to count some of the tools or objects you use. For example, you might say, "Now I'm going to get three forks" or "Let's put these three bags of groceries away."

5. Sing songs such as "Ten Little Indians" with your child. Hold up the number of fingers that goes with each part of the song. Do the same with fingerplays such as "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe."

Sincerely,

MORE MATH MAGIC

Dear Parents,

The world of mathematics is fascinating. We use numbers, number concepts, geometry, and measurement to help explain and understand the world we live in. Without a grasp of certain mathematical principles, much of what we do every day (shopping, cooking, building, and so on) would be very difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish.

Children, too, need to understand the importance of some of these mathematical concepts and their uses in their own lives. Obviously, there is a lot of fun that can be had with arithmetic. Sharing that fun and excitement with your child will be an important task for you as your child grows and develops. The following activities are some additional suggestions for you to share with your child as he or she explores and learns more about the world.

1. Acquaint your child with simple geometric shapes, including the circle, square, triangle, and rectangle. Help your child locate household objects and magazine pictures that are formed from these shapes. Assist your child to make pictures from these shapes.

2. Help your child develop an awareness of time, including such terms as <u>today</u>, <u>tomorrow</u>, <u>yesterday</u>, and so on. Familiarize your child with the calendar, including the names of the days and the concept of a week, by referring to the calendar frequently. You might allow your child to keep track of important events such as family birthdays on his or her own calendar.

3. Show your child the clock and refer to it often in your conversation about routine events such as bedtime, dinnertime, and scheduling of favorite TV shows. Discuss the functions of the long and short hands and even help your child to tell time on the hour if he or she is interested and ready to learn the concept.

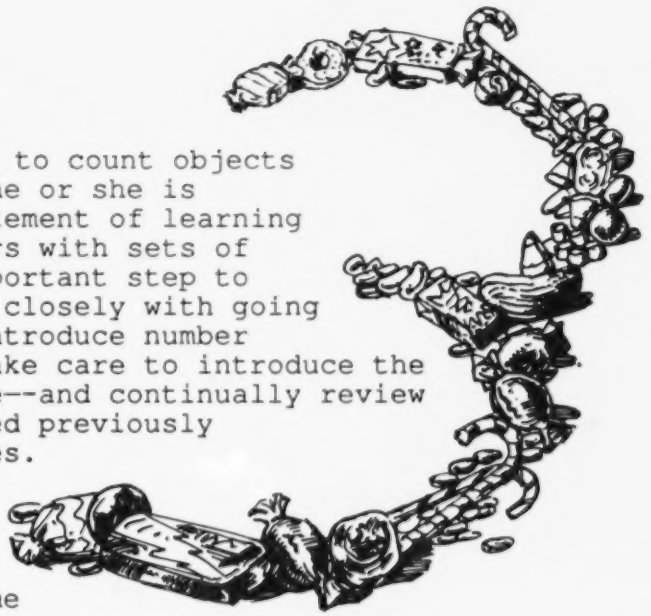
4. Without forcing memorization of money values, introduce your child to coins, including the penny, the nickel, the dime, and the quarter. Help your child understand which ones are worth "more" and "less." Allow your child to help you pay for small items at the store and to have some money of his or her own to keep in a bank.

5. As your child begins to recognize numbers, help him or her to understand their relative values. Help your child make a "bar graph" or tally the number of cars, trucks, dolls, brothers and sisters, and so on. Using a graph or tally sheet will help your child understand the relative value of numbers. Keeping track of a child's height and weight will help your child understand number values as well.

6. Preparing simple snacks and meals will provide wonderful opportunities for your child to count and measure. Let your child help you with beating a brownie mix for two minutes or dividing a sandwich in half. Introduce your child to measuring cups, spoons, and timers as you have fun working.

Sincerely,

NUMERAL KNOWLEDGE



Dear Parents,

Once your child is able to count objects and match and compare sets, he or she is generally ready for the excitement of learning to recognize and match numbers with sets of objects. This is a really important step to children--one they associate closely with going to school. As you begin to introduce number recognition to your child, take care to introduce the numbers slowly--one at a time--and continually review any numbers your child learned previously before you proceed to new ones.

Have fun when you do these activities with your child. Perhaps these suggestions will help you come up with some of your own!

1. Look through that household "junk" again searching for containers. Old berry baskets, coffee cans, and egg cartons will fill the bill! Label the front of each container with a number written in large print. Help your child sort the correct number of objects to go into each container. As your child begins to show an understanding of the number of objects for each container, let your child count them and put them in the appropriate containers independently. You can also take the numbers off the cans and have your child put them back on the one containing the correct number of objects.

2. With your child, look through the newspaper or some magazines for examples of numbers. Your child may want to cut one of these out and paste it on a sheet of paper. Have your child cut out or draw the correct number of objects and paste them on this page. Do this with a series of numbers, and assemble the pages to make a number booklet. You can even have your child assemble an entire booklet devoted to one number, for example, "My Book of Six."

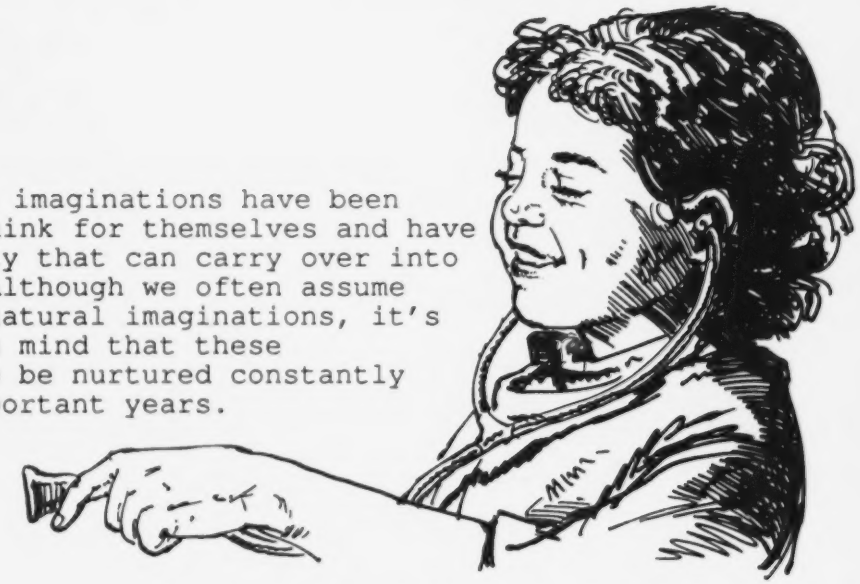
3. Make a hopscotch game with chalk on the sidewalk, driveway, or any cement floor. Then give your child a beanbag and allow him or her to toss it to a number you call out. You can also let your child toss the beanbag on any numbered block and have him or her identify the number.

4. Let your child finger trace numbers that you call out in a tray of sand or salt. You can also let your child have fun making numbers on the kitchen table with miniature marshmallows, chocolate bits, or peanuts. If your child can identify a number, you might let him or her "eat" it.

5. Use a deck of playing cards as a set of flashcards. Help your child identify some of the numbers on individual cards. But remember that this is not a testing situation. Keep it informal and unstructured. You may want to share just one number every few days or so.

Sincerely,

MAKE-BELIEVE



Dear Parents,

Children whose imaginations have been developed tend to think for themselves and have a sense of creativity that can carry over into their later lives. Although we often assume that children have natural imaginations, it's important to keep in mind that these imaginations need to be nurtured constantly throughout these important years.

Your child's imagination can be used to create a wide range of games and activities. Most of the following suggestions are ideas for you to initiate, yet they also provide sufficient opportunities for your child to invent and create his or her own activities.

1. Have your child imagine that he or she can be several different types of animals (for example, a cat, a mouse, an elephant, a bird, and so on). He or she may want to imitate a certain animal after looking through magazines or watching a TV program.

2. Arrange large cardboard boxes into different structures. For example, you and your child may want to arrange them into the shape of a castle, a fort, or a house.

3. Shine a bright light on the wall and work with your child in creating some unusual or interesting silhouettes. For each silhouette, ask your child to make up a story about the figure and what it is doing.

4. Help your child create a variety of musical instruments using common household objects. For example, glasses filled to various levels and tapped with a spoon, a piece of toilet tissue wrapped around a comb and blown, two pot lids banged together, blunt utensils banged on the kitchen counter, and many others can be used to make a most unusual orchestra. See how many different instruments your child can create on his or her own.

5. Have your child look at various cloud formations and describe what he or she sees. What interesting creatures or people can be found in the clouds?

6. Make up an original story with your child as the central character. You may want to create a tale with your child in a far-off land, on a desert island, or battling an enormous dragon. Your child may want to create stories, too, with you or other family members as the main characters.

Sincerely,

MIND PICTURES

Dear Parents,

One of the most valuable gifts you can give your child is the gift of imagination--a gift you can help foster with some of the following activities.

1. Read lots of fairy tales and tall tales to your child. Have your child tell you about or draw pictures of the images these stories create in his or her mind.

2. As you and your child watch television together, turn the brightness control all the way down so the screen is completely dark. Listen to a show and ask your child to demonstrate or tell you what the characters are doing.

3. Sing some children's songs with your child and act them out. Songs such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," "Old MacDonald," and "I've Been Working on the Railroad" lend themselves to imaginative interpretation.

4. Use commercially produced puppets or encourage your child to make his or her own puppets from popsicle sticks, bits of cloth, beads, yarn, string, glue, paper bags, paper cups, and other household items. Ask your child to create his or her own "play" and act out various scenes. (You may wish to have your child imagine that the puppets are family members.)

5. Allow your child to use common household items such as brooms, boxes, baskets, old clothing, telephones, and sheets to stimulate imaginative play.

Sincerely,

IMAGINE THAT!

Dear Parents,

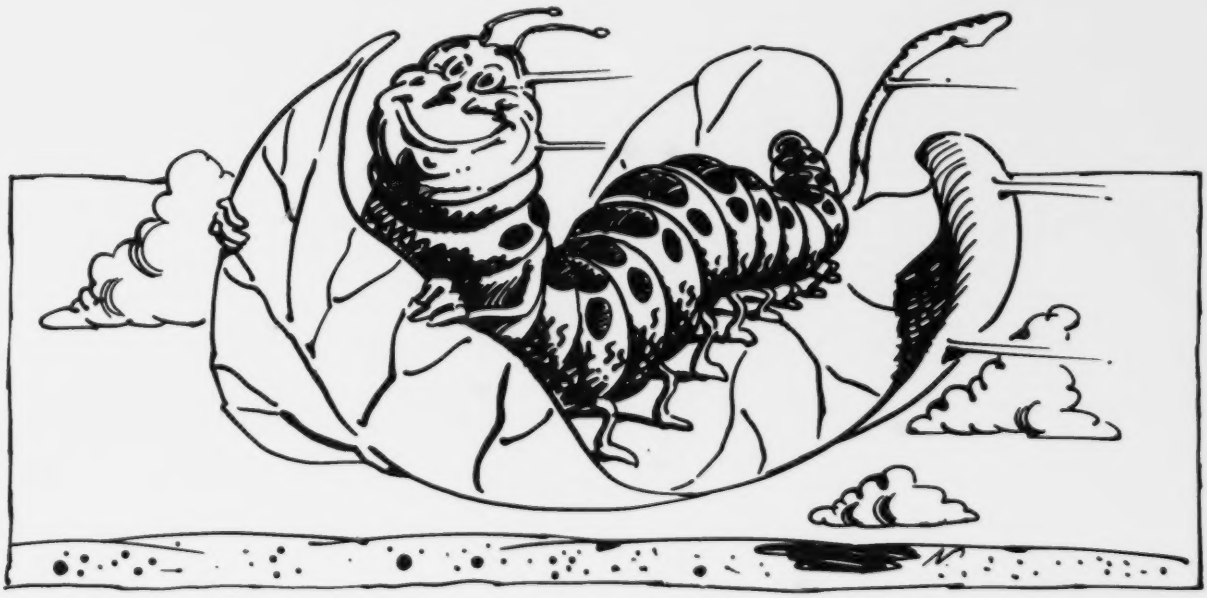
Provide your child with many opportunities to use his or her imagination and you will be opening up a fascinating world of discoveries and possibilities. Children who are provided with many creative outlets are those who can find excitement in a cardboard box, adventure in a pile of wooden blocks, and mystery in their own backyard. Share the limitless reaches of the human mind with your child and you will help ensure that your child is never bored on a rainy day. You may wish to consider some of the following activities for you and your child to share together.

1. Play a game of silhouettes with your child. Make shadows on the wall with your hands in front of a strong light. Create a story about each character. Have your child create characters and stories, too.

2. Use some kitchen utensils to create some make-believe characters with your child. Put a pot on your head and become a pirate. Use some spoons to become a rock-and-roll drummer. Use some pans, glasses, cups, and other items to create an imaginary kingdom on the kitchen table.

3. Take an old sheet, put it over you or your child to create as many characters as possible. A ghost would be a natural, but can you also make the shape of a giraffe, an elephant, a race car, or a hot dog? Play a game with your child in which you and your child try to guess the shapes each has made.

4. As you and your child walk outside or around the house, create magical items from common everyday things. For



example, a fallen leaf could be a magic carpet for a caterpillar, a nail could be a sword used by an invisible dwarf, or a coffee cup could be a boat for a family of mice sailing across the ocean. Make up some stories or games with your child using some of these items.

5. Use some brown lunch bags or grocery bags to create a variety of games and objects with your child. For example, the bags can be used to create some masks; set up on the floor they can be used as "baskets" in a game of basketball; a number of them placed on the floor can create an obstacle course; or they can be arranged on the table and designated as dangerous creatures on a distant planet. Use other common household objects to create a variety of objects or items around which any number of stories can be created.

Sincerely,

DEVELOPING MUSCLES

Dear Parents,

Muscle development is important in young children since it helps in coordination for a number of activities. Large muscles need to be able to work together for your child to maintain balance and engage in activities such as running, throwing, and swinging. Your child should participate in some physical activities daily in order to get proper exercise and help develop muscle control. Some of the following activities may be helpful.

1. Show your child how to walk or move like several wild animals. Have your child walk like an elephant, swing like a monkey, hop like a rabbit, crawl like a snake, or move like an inchworm. From time to time ask your child to suggest various animals and imitate their movements.

2. Place a piece of string, rope, or masking tape on the floor and ask your child to do some of the following: walk next to the string, hop over the string, walk backward along the string, walk with one foot on either side of the string, run around the string, or put the string in a circle and hop in and out of it.

3. Play a game of catch with your child. Throw a ball back and forth, roll the ball along the floor and catch it, bounce the ball and catch it, and kick the ball back and forth. Begin with large balls, and when your child is ready, use smaller ones.

4. Get a set of large blocks for your child and work on building various shapes and structures together. Be sure to give your child plenty of freedom to create as many different buildings as possible.

5. Whenever possible, take your child to a local park or play area. Be sure your child has many opportunities to play on the swings and other playground equipment. Roll up your sleeves and take a ride on the swings and merry-go-round, too!

6. Set up an indoor or outdoor obstacle course for your child, or help your child plan such a course using common household objects such as boxes, chairs, trashcans, tables, and so on. Make sure that crawling, jumping, pushing, and pulling are used to complete the course.

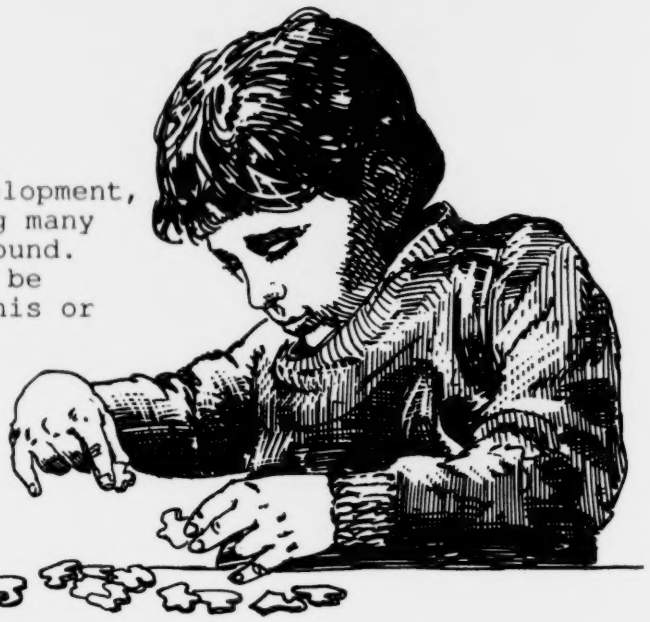
7. Help your child improve his or her toss and aim by using beanbags. Your child can toss first into large containers such as cardboard boxes. Then your child can toss the beanbag into smaller containers such as wastebaskets.

8. Assist your child with jumping rope by having him or her jump a stationary rope raised slightly above the ground and then jump a slowly swinging rope. Finally, introduce him or her to traditional rope jumping.

9. Use a curb, a railroad tie, or a two-by-four as a balance beam. Have your child walk forward, backward, and sideways. Then have him or her balance on one foot on the beam.

Sincerely,

FINE MOTOR SKILLS



Dear Parents,

During this time of development, your child will be discovering many new things about the world around. Additionally, your child will be learning more and more about his or her own body--how it moves, grows, and functions. Learning to use and control both large and small muscles is a very important skill.

Basically, the body is made up of both large and small muscles. Children will usually learn to use their large muscles (those for crawling, walking, and lifting) before they begin learning to use their small muscles (those for drawing, writing, and picking up objects). Yet there are a wide variety of games and activities that you and your child can participate in to help your child gain some control over his or her small muscles. Try some of the following.

1. Make several cardboard cutouts of some geometric shapes such as squares, triangles, circles, ovals, and so on (or use cookie cutters). Give your child a sheet of paper and ask him or her to trace around the shapes with a pencil or crayon. Assist your child with cutting these shapes as well as other objects using blunt scissors. If your child is left-handed, you will need to purchase special scissors for him or her.

2. Give your child some yarn or string and help him or her to string various objects on it. For example, you may use beads, Cheerios, macaroni, or buttons.

3. Provide many opportunities for your child to use crayons. Be sure to display his or her work on the refrigerator or in some other appropriate location.

4. Simple jigsaw puzzles are excellent for helping your child develop the motor skills necessary for other learning tasks, such as writing.

5. Encourage your child to practice self-help skills that require fine motor control. Snapping, zipping, and tying shoes are examples of some fine motor tasks.

6. Provide your child with opportunities to play with modeling clay. Forming objects from clay is excellent fine motor practice and helps build hand strength.

7. Before teaching your child to write with a pencil, give him or her opportunities to write and draw with larger writing implements, including chalk, paintbrushes, and crayons. Writing or drawing with these implements does not require as much fine motor control.

Sincerely,

HANDWRITING DEVELOPMENT

Dear Parents,

Many activities require the use of both large motor as well as small motor skills. As your child grows and matures, he or she will be participating in many learning situations requiring the use and coordination of many muscles and many muscle groups. One of the most important activities will be handwriting. Some of the following activities can be included in your daily playtime with your child; all influence handwriting development.

1. Provide your child with lots of jigsaw puzzles or toys that have interlocking pieces. Let your child snap pieces together, arrange items in a chain, or create a string of beads using any number of inexpensive toys currently on the market.

2. Let your child trace letters, pictures, or words found in books or magazines. Keep the designs simple and allow your child to use a large writing instrument such as a crayon or felt-tip marker.

3. If possible, have your child build some simple objects. Stacking a group of blocks into a tower, piling boxes on top of each other, hammering a nail into two pieces of wood, or taping pieces of paper together are all possibilities.

4. Have your child practice holding a number of kitchen utensils such as spoons, spatulas, light pans, beaters, and so on. Provide opportunities for your child to use these items to stir or mix some simple recipes.

5. Since handwriting requires mastery of several different strokes, you can provide some preliminary practice at home. Let your child enjoy fingerpainting, stirring a bowl of water with a spoon, making circles in the sand with his or her finger, or moving a toy boat in patterns through a bathtub full of water.

6. Have your child trace large letters (cut from newspaper headlines or magazines) with his or her finger. Make sure the letters are large enough for your child's finger to fit inside the outline.

Sincerely,

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Dear Parents,

Along with thinking about your child's academic development, it is important for you to give some thought to the things that will help your child deal with the world in which he or she lives. This aspect of your child's development, known as social development, provides children with the opportunity to effectively deal with other people as well as to gain a measure of respect for themselves. You can help in your child's social development with some of these activities.

1. From time to time discuss some of the jobs various people in your community do, such as police work, construction work, owning a shop, and the like. Show your child that there are many people who help to keep our towns and cities safe and well run.

2. Discuss with your child words that describe how people feel. Talk about words such as happy, sad, worried, lonely, and afraid. You and your child may want to look in some magazines for examples of people who display these emotions. Explain to your child that it is natural to have any of these feelings and encourage him or her to tell you about different feelings.

3. As you and your child view a television program, talk about some of the ways people in the show behave toward one another. Help your child understand that there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways for people to interact. And remember, you are a role model for your child. Your child learns more from what you do than from what you say.

4. Select some photographs of various family members and relatives. Discuss with your child some of the

relationships in the family (brother, uncle, grandmother, and so on). Help your child understand that many different kinds of people can be in a family. You could even help your child draw a family tree.

5. Whenever possible, give your child plenty of opportunities to be around other children. Trips to the park, the local zoo, the museum, or the shopping mall present good opportunities for your child to observe and play with other children in very relaxed settings.

6. Encourage your child's efforts to be independent as long as his or her safety is not jeopardized. As your child develops independence, his or her self-concept improves and your child will be less fearful of new experiences.

Sincerely,

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Dear Parents,

Children need to learn many things as they grow up. Although many of these skills may deal with academic concerns, there are a large number of skills youngsters acquire that help them get along with others and communicate with many different people. These social skills are important throughout your child's growth and development--not just for now, but during your child's entire life.

1. Talk with your child about how his or her behavior might be different or the same in each of the following situations.
   a. at a grocery store
   b. at a movie theater
   c. in a car
   d. in the living room
   e. in a museum or library

2. Discuss with your child the types of emotions he or she might display in each of the following situations.
   a. someone hits your car
   b. a baby keeps crying in a restaurant
   c. a favorite toy is stolen
   d. a local play area is permanently closed
   e. a favorite playmate moves away

3. Talk with your child about what he or she would do in each of the following situations.
   a. there is a fire next door
   b. a dog is sick
   c. there are loud cars on the street
   d. a loud person is in a store
   e. a friend is unhappy

Sincerely,

GROWING UP

Dear Parents,

Growing up can be an exciting time for children. With so many new things to learn, new people to meet, and new places to go, your child will be experiencing some of the most dynamic times of his or her life during these years. Unquestionably, one very important part of your child's development will be the many people he or she meets--both adults and other children. It is from all these people that your child learns valuable social skills--skills that shape and mold his or her personality. You may wish to try some of the following ideas with your child as activities to help develop social skills.

1. Ask your child to name various types of feelings, which then can be listed on a sheet of paper. Look through some old magazines or newspapers with your child to locate photos of people displaying some of those emotions. These pictures can be cut out and pasted on paper.

2. Take a walk with your child down the street or around the block. As you encounter other people, talk about the emotions or feelings they may be showing. Discuss some possible events that may have contributed to those emotions. Provide your child with plenty of opportunities to use his or her imagination.

3. Talk with your child about others who may have characteristics or features different from his or her own: people with a different skin color, a physical handicap, a speech impediment, and so on. You may wish to begin by discussing the differing characteristics of people in your family--Uncle Ed's bald head, Cousin Sally's freckles, and so on.

4. Talk with your child about some of the following situations. Discuss a variety of responses and possibilities. How could you
   a. make a friend happy?
   b. make your parents sad?
   c. help your brother or sister have a good time?
   d. be a friend?

5. Make some simple sock puppets and use them to have your child act out some of the events in his or her day. Discuss any feelings or reactions on the part of the characters as well as any alternative actions they may have taken.

Sincerely,

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

Dear Parents,

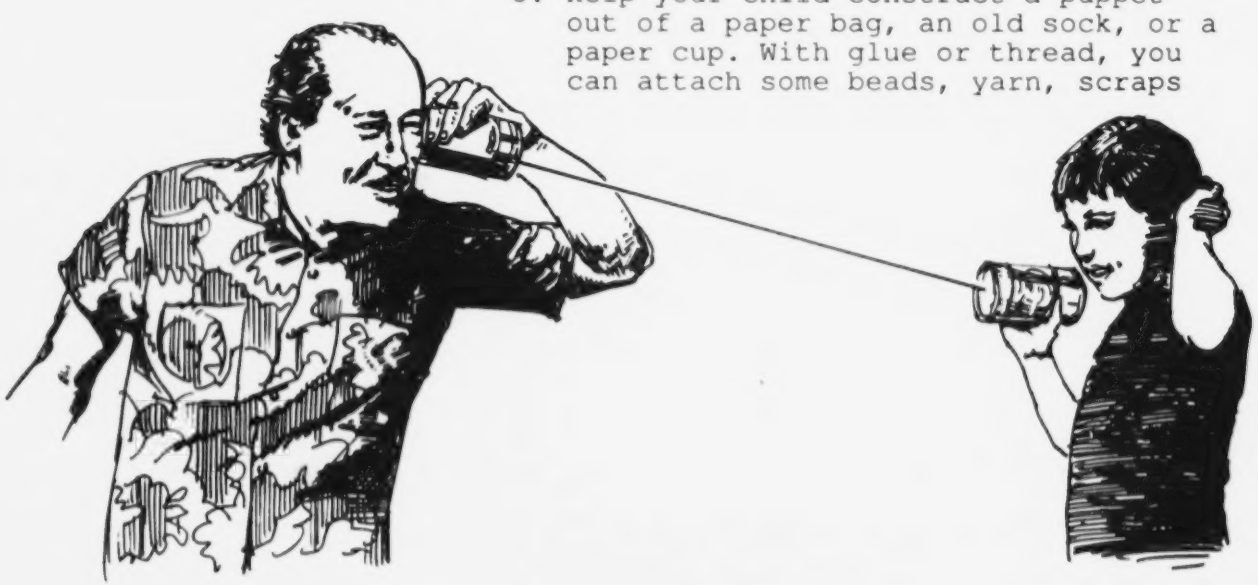
Children need to grow up in a home that is rich in communication opportunities. Children who have been talked to and are given opportunities to talk themselves are children who begin to develop language skills that will last them their whole lives. It is important for you, as a parent, to spend as much time as possible talking with your child, in addition to giving your child many opportunities to express himself or herself.

Helping your child learn to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings is vital to his or her growth. Not only does it offer your child a chance to use language, but it also provides your child with a valuable sharing opportunity that is important in the development of a good self-concept. However, as your child learns to talk, please don't expect perfection. As you listen to your child, casually restate correctly any mistakes. For example, if your child says, "I love my wabbit," you would say "I love that rabbit, too." And try to discourage "baby talk." You can be an important model for your child throughout this learning process.

1. After you have read a book to your child, ask him or her to dramatize part of the story for you. Your child may wish to add or delete characters, actions, or scenes. If so, ask why this was done.

2. Create a continuous story with your child. Begin by saying something like "Once there was an elf that lived in the downstairs closet." Have your child contribute the next line for the story. Then you add a line, and your child adds another line, and so on. Continue the story until you both run out of ideas.

3. Help your child construct a puppet out of a paper bag, an old sock, or a paper cup. With glue or thread, you can attach some beads, yarn, scraps



of fabric, or bits of colored paper. Encourage your child to make up an original story using the puppet as a prop.

4. From time to time, obtain an unusual object for your child such as a shell, a brightly colored flower, a pine cone, or an unusually shaped rock. Spend some time describing the object with your child. Make sure your child has plenty of opportunities to share some information, too.

5. Using two empty tin cans and a length of string, help your child make a special telephone (see illustration). Go outside with your child and talk to each other using your special "telephone." You may also want to use this phone between two rooms in your house.

Sincerely,

A CASE FOR COMMUNICATION

Dear Parents,

As you develop your child's ability to speak and listen, you will find it helpful to provide your child with a wide range of experiences for him or her to talk about. These experiences need not be expensive. In fact, many of them are free and will not take you far from your normal routine. These experiences may include visits to story hour at the public library, trips to the shopping center, excursions to the park, or walks around your neighborhood. Any such experiences will help your child develop a rich and varied vocabulary as well as an understanding of the world.

To help develop your child's oral language, try some of the following activities.

1. Play the "I am thinking of" game. Without naming the object, describe an item in the room and let your child guess what it is. Then switch roles and let your child do the describing while you do the guessing.

2. Blindfold your child and let him or her feel an object. As your child uses his or her sense of touch to discover the object's qualities, have your child describe the object aloud. Allow several guesses before calling "time." You can reverse roles in this activity, as well.

3. Read to your child every day. After you have read a story, let your child retell it in his or her own words. This activity also encourages good listening.

4. Provide your child with opportunities to engage in dramatic play. Materials that would encourage this include old sheets, cardboard boxes, worn-out telephones, and dress-up clothes. These imaginary conversations will encourage your child to speak without inhibition.

5. Do some fingerplays with your child. Put a piece of first-aid tape on each of the fingers of one hand and draw an individual face on each finger with a felt-tip pen. Make up a story or share one from a favorite book using the "finger characters" to "tell" the tale.

6. Play a game of "Charades" with your child from time to time. Pantomime a common family activity (setting the

table, walking the dog, washing the dishes) and ask your child to describe and guess the actions. Be sure to give your child plenty of opportunities to be "it" as well. As your child becomes more proficient with this activity, encourage him or her to pantomime more complex actions.

Sincerely,

LEARNING TO LISTEN

Dear Parents,

One of the most valuable skills your child can learn is that of listening. In fact, more than 50 percent of what your child will learn in school will depend on how well he or she is able to listen and follow directions. Young children need to be able to understand, remember, and act on what they hear, both at home and when they begin school.

You can help your child develop good listening skills through some of the following activities. Try to use some of them every day as you and your child learn and play together.

1. Be sure to read stories to your child on a regular basis. You may wish to point to words as you read them aloud. This helps your child understand the relationship between spoken and written language. As you read, omit a word and let your child suggest one that makes sense in the context. Ask your child questions about the selection to emphasize his or her oral comprehension.

2. Take time to listen to your child patiently and without interruption. Share the events in your day (at home or at work), using the terms first, next, last, before, and after. Ask your child about his or her day by using these sequence words. For example, you might ask, "What did you do first today?" or "What came right after lunch?"

3. As you make requests of your child, note the number of directions your child can recall and respond to correctly. Make a game of gradually increasing the number of directions he or she can follow. Let your child make up directions for you to follow as well.

4. From time to time, take a walk with your child around the neighborhood or block. Ask your child to listen for various sounds and to identify them. You may wish to make a recording of the sounds you hear on your walks or around the house.

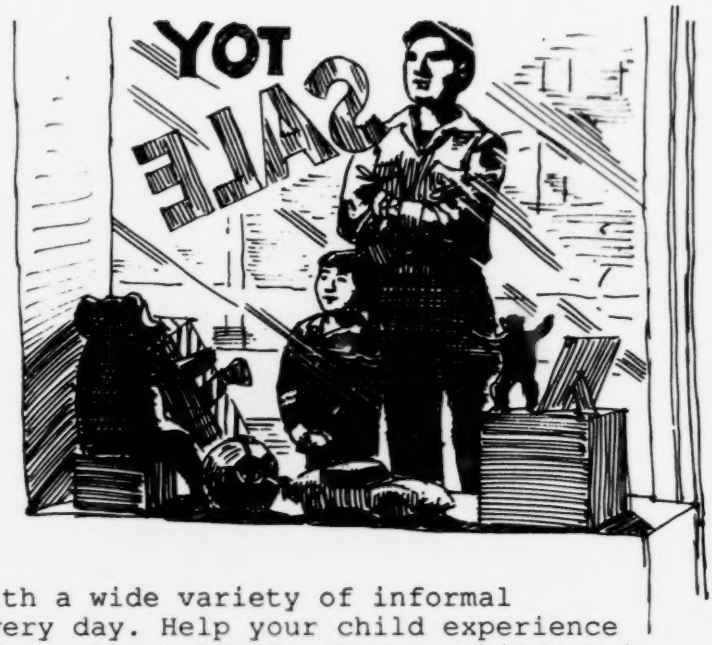
5. Play a rhyming game with your child. Say two rhyming words to your child and ask for one more word that rhymes with the first two. For example, if you say "hop, mop,"

your child could say "top." Read nursery rhymes or rhyming poems, leaving out alternate rhyming words. Let your child complete the rhymes as you pause.

6. Introduce your child to rhythm by having him or her clap to the beat of music, move to its rhythm, or play homemade instruments in time to the music.

Sincerely,

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT I



Dear Parents,

One of the most valuable things you can do with your youngster as he or she grows is to provide unlimited opportunities to explore the world. The more experiences a child has with his or her environment the more comprehension that child will have when learning in school.

As a parent you can provide your child with a wide variety of informal learning opportunities every day. Help your child experience the many things that make up the world. Teach your child their names, functions, and relationships to one another. The following activities may help you get started.

1. Take frequent walks around your house or through the neighborhood with your child. Be sure to point out some of the things you see and name them. Encourage your child to ask questions about some of these new discoveries. If you cannot provide the answers, use an encyclopedia or some other reference book to search out the answer.

2. With your child, go through old magazines with many pictures, stopping frequently to discuss a particular picture and some of its details. You and your child may wish to work together to assemble a scrapbook of favorite pictures.

3. Place a number of small household objects, such as a spoon, scissors, keys, a watch, a toy car, a pen, and a ring, into a cardboard box. Play a game with your child in which you show all the objects and describe them for your child. Then put them all in the box and ask your child to select "something made of metal used to open doors," for example. Do the same for the other objects.

4. Whenever possible, take your child with you on shopping trips to the grocery store, clothing store, mall, or toy store. Point out some of the items in the store and describe their names and functions for your child. Have your child identify other examples of those objects and describe them for you as well.

5. As you do certain tasks around the house, take some time to explain your activity to your child--for example, when you are ironing clothes, gardening, vacuuming the carpet,

or working in the garage. If possible, have your child participate in the task as well.

6. You and your child may wish to get a small pet such as a hamster, a gerbil, a fish, or a mouse. Plan with your child how the animal will be housed, how it will be cared for, and what it will be fed. Later, observe and discuss the pet with your child.

7. Have your child sort objects into categories such as fruits, shapes, body parts, or clothing. Help your child learn to name the appropriate label for each group of objects.

8. Help your child understand and use positional words by letting him or her place objects "on top of," "beside," "next to," or "behind" other objects.

Sincerely,

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT II

Dear Parents,

As you help your child develop a good speaking vocabulary, you will be helping your child with concept development at the same time. An understanding of concepts will help your child develop a framework for all of his or her vocabulary words. The major concepts are categories such as toys, animals, vegetables, and the like. Other concepts are position words including over, above, around, and so on.

Activities such as the following will help your child develop an awareness of concepts.

1. Help your child do lots of sorting activities first with objects, then with pictures. Your child can sort "foods," "shapes," "body parts," and so on.

2. Assist your child to understand and use position words by letting him or her stand "on top of the stairs," sit "beside the teddy bear," walk "behind" you, and so on. You can help your child with this by having him or her place objects using these same terms.

3. Use bookmaking activities to help with concept development. Your child can make "My Book of Toys," "My Book of Foods," "My Book of Pets," and so on.

4. Help your child with action words by saying a noun and having your child tell you what it does. For example, "birds--fly," "dogs--bark," "cars--drive," and so on. Reverse roles so that your child is naming the noun and you are naming the action.

5. Let your child look in magazines for pictures that "go together," and discuss how the pictures are related. Some examples might be "peaches--pie," "stove--kitchen," "car--garage," and so on.

Sincerely,

LEARNING NEW CONCEPTS

Dear Parents,

Learning about the world your child lives in will be a very valuable part of his or her academic and social growth. The concepts your child forms now will serve as the foundation for further exploration and discovery. Opening up the limitless possibilities for learning now can be one of the most valuable things you can do as a parent. You may wish to consider some of the following activities and ideas for you and your child to share together.

1. Talk about size differences with your child. Discuss who is the tallest or shortest person in the family. What is the widest or narrowest item in the living room? What is the lightest or heaviest object in the kitchen?

2. Discuss the position of various objects. For example, what is on your child's left side? right side? overhead? underneath? behind? in front?

3. Ask your child to look for items in the neighborhood that could be grouped into various categories. You might ask, for example, "What items are similar to cars?" (provide transportation). Responses could include trucks, buses, motorcycles, scooters, skates, and so on.

4. Talk about items in your house that can be used in more than one location: table (living room, kitchen); chair (bedroom, kitchen); lamp (bedroom, living room); and so on.

5. Play a riddle game with your child. Say, "I'm thinking of something that's long and used for writing. What is it?" or "I'm thinking of something that's silver and used to cook eggs. What is it?"

6. Give your child some old magazines or newspapers. Work with him or her and cut out pictures of objects similar to those found in your home: table, chair, bed, dresser, and so on.

Sincerely,

VISUAL SKILLS

Dear Parents,

At this stage in your child's growth and development, every day is a new day of learning. One important skill is that of visual perception, or a child's ability to note similarities and differences between objects and letters of the alphabet. This skill is very important when your child enters school, since there are many words and letters that your child will be learning that seem to look alike.

You can help promote good visual skills through some of the following activities, particularly if they are used regularly throughout the day.

1. Help your child develop good visual skills by pointing out differences in color, size, shape, form, and position of things in the environment. For example, you may want to show your child that a truck is composed of rectangles and squares, a house is brown and white, or that there are large and small bridges.

2. Work puzzles with your child. Start off with a simple jigsaw puzzle containing few pieces, and as your child becomes more proficient, move up to puzzles with more pieces. Give your child opportunities to select puzzles for the two of you to work on together.

3. You and your child may wish to create your own puzzles by pasting a favorite magazine picture on a piece of cardboard. Cut the cardboard apart into several different-sized shapes. Ask your child to put it back together.

4. Using several common household objects such as buttons, beans, pennies, or straws, play a pattern game with your child. For example, line up a button, two beans, and a nail. Ask your child to duplicate the pattern. Repeat this activity using a variety of patterns. Provide opportunities for your child to set up patterns for you to duplicate as well.

5. Give your child a large assortment of different-sized objects such as a collection of buttons or a handful of various beans. Ask your child to sort the objects according to size.

Sincerely,

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AUDITORY SKILLS

Dear Parents,

At this stage in your child's development, he or she is learning to listen to many things--people talking, sounds outside the house, and the sounds of new words. Children learn to tell the difference between various sounds and thus develop the ability to identify various parts of their environment. Also, since most of what children will eventually learn in school will depend on good listening skills, it is vitally important that they develop those skills early.

Help your child learn to identify specific sounds. By keeping these suggestions fun and exciting, you can help promote this valuable skill. You may wish to start with sounds that are completely different and eventually move on to sounds that are almost similar in nature. Keep in mind that these activities can become a regular part of the time you share with your child every day.

1. While your child has his or her eyes closed, make various sounds in the room such as a door slamming, a book dropping, or a chair squeaking. Ask your child to identify the sound and the object making it.

2. Periodically take a walk around your neighborhood with your child. Direct your child to identify some of the different sounds heard (trucks rumbling, birds chirping, the breeze blowing, and so on). You and your child may wish to make a tape recording of newly identified sounds.

3. Play a rhythm game with your child using a selection of different sounds. For example, clap your hands twice, stamp your feet once, and clap your hands twice. Ask your child to repeat the pattern and then to create one for you to copy. You may also wish to use some kitchen items (spoons, glasses, and so on) to create some rhythms for your child to duplicate.

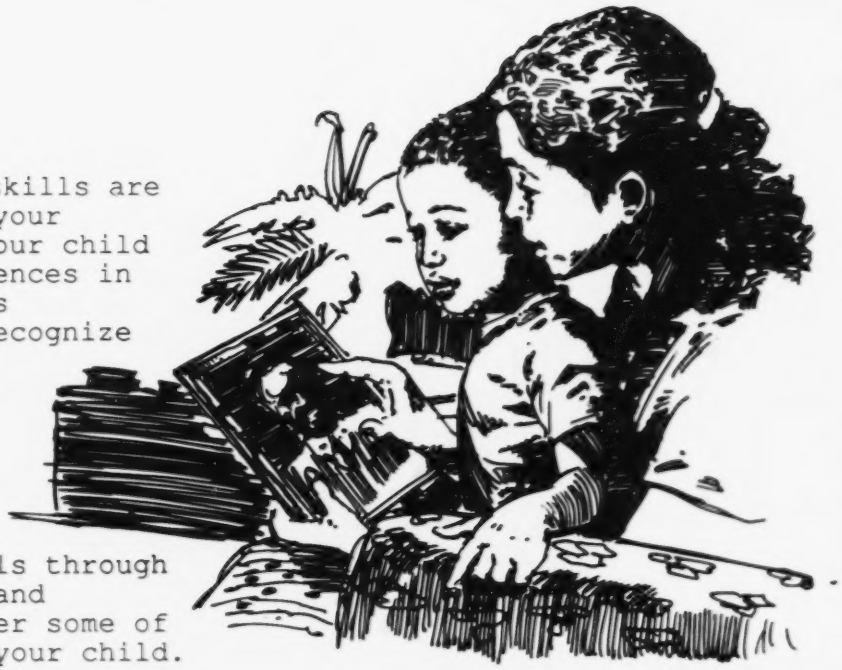
Begin with one pattern for your child to duplicate, and if your child can reproduce it with ease, gradually add more patterns. Allow your child to make sound patterns for you to duplicate as well.

4. Read some nursery rhymes or poems to your child. Ask your child to identify the words that sound alike (that rhyme). You may wish to print some of these words for your child.

5. When traveling in the car, you can play a game with your child such as: "I'm thinking of a word that begins with the same sound as cookie" (clothes, coat, cap, car). Reverse roles and have your child say a word for you to match initial sounds.

Sincerely,

LOOK ALL AROUND



Dear Parents,

Good visual skills are very important to your child. They help your child distinguish differences in letters and numbers (reading, math); recognize important elements of the environment (science); and identify objects in a room (play). You can help your child develop his or her visual skills through a number of games and activities. Consider some of the following for your child.

1. Look through old magazines or newspapers and ask your child to identify some of the items or people in various pictures. Ask your child to point to items found in more than one picture.

2. Using some photographs or magazine pictures, discuss with your child some of the different colors. Which colors are similar to those found in your home? Which ones are different?

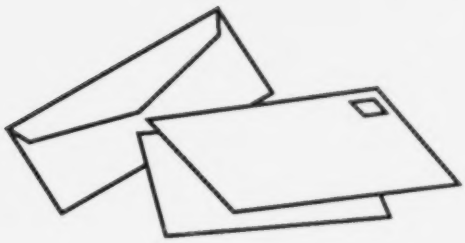
3. As you and your child are looking at a photograph, talk about some of the details in the picture. Remove the photo and ask your child to discuss those details with you.

4. Before going outside with your child, talk about some of the items and objects you might find. You may wish to have your child draw a picture and then compare his or her ideas with the actual objects.

5. Ask your child to look around the room and locate two objects that are the same color or size. Can your child locate three items that are the same?

6. Give your child a small box and ask him or her to collect various items. For example, can your child find three round objects that could be put into the box? Four square ones? Two blue and two green objects?

Sincerely,



Special Projects

The projects and activities in this section provide you with the opportunity to share some additional ideas with the parents of your students. Each of the following pages is an extension of one or more of the ideas mentioned in the previous letters. You may choose to use these sheets in several different ways.

1. A Special Projects sheet can be duplicated and attached to one or more Parent Letters during the course of the year. This provides parents with some extended activities to share with their children.
2. Special Projects sheets can be sent home individually with certain students in order to help reinforce the development of specific skills or attributes. By keeping abreast of each child's growth and development, you can "assign" these sheets as they are needed.
3. You may choose to send home a Special Projects sheet to all your students in lieu of one of the Parent Letters. This can be done when you wish to emphasize a particular area of development or perhaps give parents a "break" from the activities and suggestions on the letters.
4. The design and format of the Special Projects sheets allow them to be included as a special page in a school or classroom newsletter regularly sent home to parents. This option provides you with the opportunity to not only send home the letters to parents but also to include additional suggestions as part of a newsletter or parent brochure.
5. The Special Projects sheets are also appropriate for use at regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences. Distributed during or at the conclusion of a conference, they can be used to reinforce some of the developmental skills mentioned during the conference.
6. Several of the Special Projects can be used repeatedly throughout the year. You may wish to duplicate these sheets and keep them on file to send home periodically.

However you decide to use the Special Projects sheets, they can be an added bonus in helping to establish positive home-school relationships. Sent home throughout the year, they can help ensure that parents are provided with meaningful and relevant ideas on how to participate in their child's social, emotional, and academic development.

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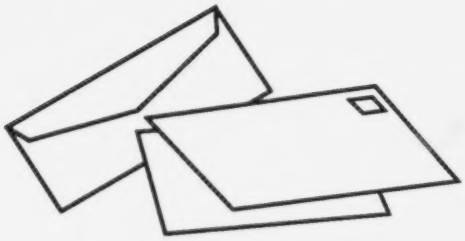

My Name/My Hand/ My Picture

Helping your child develop a positive self-image will be one of the most important jobs you can do as a parent. The following activity sheets provide your child with an opportunity to describe himself or herself in a very positive way. Work with your child in completing these sheets. Your child may wish to include drawings, photographs, or a combination of the two in completing these sheets. You may wish to prepare additional sheets for other members of the family and assemble all the sheets into a family scrapbook. Your child may choose to post these sheets on the family bulletin board or refrigerator door. If appropriate, you may wish to obtain inexpensive frames for these sheets, too.

MY HAND

_____

MY NAME

I WAS BORN AT _____ ON _____
TIME DATE

IN _____ .
PLACE

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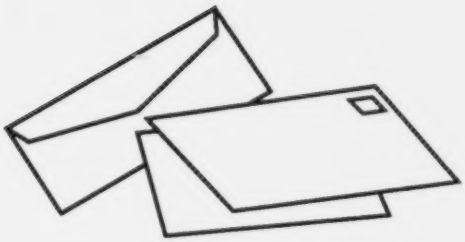

MY PICTURE

MY FAMILY

MY HOUSE

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

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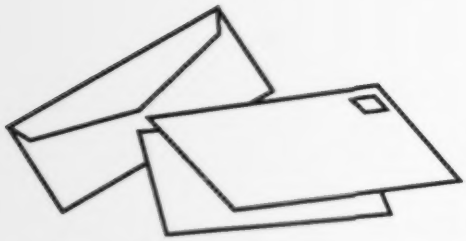

Books on Feelings and Building Confidence

Delton, Judy	*I'm Telling You Now*
Gomi, Taro	*Coco Can't Wait*
Hazen, B. S.	*The Gorilla Did It*
Heide, Florence	*Some Things Are Scary*
Hoban, Russell	*A Baby Sister for Frances*
Hoban, Russell	*Bedtime for Frances*
Hoff, Syd	*Who Will Be My Friends?*
Hutchins, Pat	*Happy Birthday, Sam*
Johnson, Crockett	*Harold and the Purple Crayon*
Keats, Ezra	*Goggles*
Keats, Ezra	*Pet Show*
Kraus, Robert	*Whose Mouse Are You?*
McPhail, David	*Pig Pig Grows Up*
Mathews, Geda	*What Was That?*
Mayer, Mercer	*There's a Nightmare in My Closet*
Myers, Bernice	*My Mother Is Lost*
Preston, Edna	*The Temper Tantrum Book*
Raskin, Ellen	*Nothing Ever Happens on My Block*
Raskin, Ellen	*Spectacles*
Rockwell, Harlow	*My Doctor*
Sharmat, Marjorie	*I'm Terrific*
Waber, Bernard	*Ira Sleeps Over*
Watanabe, Shigeo	*I Can Ride It!*
Watanabe, Shigeo	*I Can Take a Walk!*
Vogel, Isle-Margaret	*The Don't Be Scared Book*
Zolotow, Charlotte	*William's Doll*

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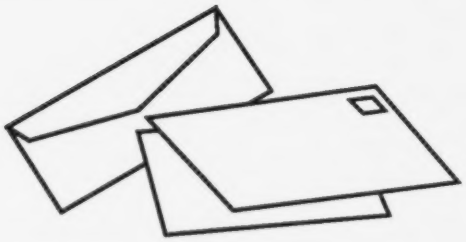

Calendar

You can help promote a lifetime of reading enjoyment and success for your child by making reading a habit early in his or her life. Sharing the joys of good books and children's literature should be a regular family activity—one practiced every single day. You can help your child get into the reading habit by using the following calendar. Post it on the family bulletin board or refrigerator for all to see. Plan a special time each day when you and your child can share a book or story together. Put your child in charge of "recording" each day's reading time with a mark or sticker in the appropriate spaces on the calendar. If you and your child read together for at least twenty days during the month, celebrate that occasion with a special treat or trip. Make another calendar for the following month and keep the reading habit going.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

Our Contract

I hereby promise to read to my child every day for 15 minutes during the month of _____.

Parents:

1. Put a ✓ mark, star, funny face, or sticker in a box for each day you and your child read together for at least 15 minutes.
2. You may wish to write in the dates for this month.
3. At the end of the month, have your child post the calendar on the refrigerator or some other appropriate place. Later, these calendars can be gathered together in a special notebook.
4. Try to read with your child for a minimum of 20 days each month. This will help establish the reading habit—one that will last a lifetime.

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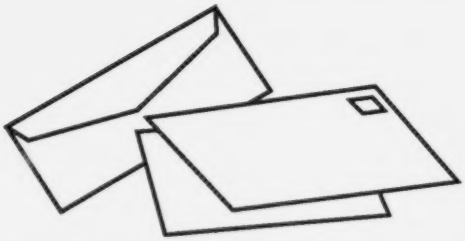

Magazines Available for Children

Chickadee 10 issues/year
P.O. Box 11314
Des Moines, IA 50340
Ages: 3–7
The focus is on nature and wildlife with loads of good photography.

Child Life 12 issues/year
1100 Waterway Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Ages: 5–12
Includes fiction, poems, learning units, arts and crafts.

Children's Playmate 12 issues/year
1100 Waterway Blvd.
P.O. Box 567-B
Indianapolis, IN 46206
Ages: 3–8
Includes articles, reader contributions, fiction stories.

Cricket 12 issues/year
Box 52961
Boulder, CO 80322
Ages: 5–12
Literature magazine with stories and articles by well-known writers.

Highlights for Children 11 issues/year
P.O. Box 269
Columbus, Ohio 43272
Ages: 3–12
Geared to fostering creativity in children with material in all subjects.

Humpty Dumpty's Magazine 12 issues/year
52 Vanderbuilt Ave.
New York, NY 10017
Ages: 5–12
A variety magazine containing stories and articles on different reading levels.

My Own Magazine 6 issues/year
(800) 323-5471
(312) 564-4070 (in IL)
Ages: 2–7
Each issue is personalized with child's name. Quality illustrations.

Scienceland 8 issues/year
501 Fifth Ave.
Suite 2102
New York, NY 10017
Ages: 3–7
Good introduction to science for preschool youngsters.

Sesame Street Magazine 10 issues/year
P.O. Box 52000
Boulder, CO 80321
Ages: 3–7
Basic academic skills are taught in a fun-filled format.

Surprises 4 issues/year
P.O. Box 236
Chanhassen, MN 55317
Ages: 4–12
Designed for cooperative play between parents and children.

Turtle 8 issues/year
P.O. Box 10003
Des Moines, IA 50340
Ages: 3–5
A health-oriented magazine containing activities and stories.

Your Big Backyard 12 issues/year
8925 Leesburg Pike
Vienna, VA 22184
Ages: 3–5
Focus is on animals and nature, including lots of activities and games.

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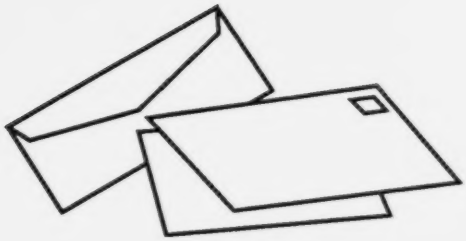

Special Brochures

You can help your child on the road to reading success through many different activities. One organization, the International Reading Association, has a number of free brochures available on how you and your child can work together on numerous reading practices and activities. To order any or all of the following brochures, send a self-addressed stamped envelope (requests for four or more titles should be accompanied by first class postage for two ounces) to:

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139

- Your Home Is Your Child's First School**
- You Can Encourage Your Child to Read**
- Good Books Make Reading Fun for Your Child*
- Summer Reading Is Important*
- You Can Use Television to Stimulate Your Child's Reading Habits**
- Studying: A Key to Success . . . Ways Parents Can Help
- You Can Help Your Child in Reading by Using the Newspaper*
- Eating Well Can Help Your Child Learn Better
- You Can Prepare Your Child for Reading Tests

* Available in French
** Available in Spanish and French

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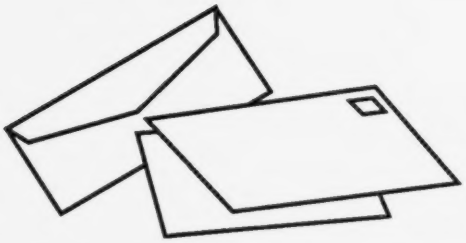

Suggested Picture Books

Ahlberg, Janet	*Each Peach Pair Plum*
Alexander, Martha	*Bob's Dream*
Aliki	*Hush Little Baby*
Allen, Pamela	*Who Sank the Boat?*
Anno, Mitsumasa	*Anno's Journey*
Arosky, Jim	*Watching Foxes*
Asch, Frank	*Just Like Daddy*
Bang, Molly	*Ten, Nine, Eight*
Black, Irma	*Is This My Dinner?*
Brown, Marc	*Hand Rhymes*
Brown, Margaret	*The Runaway Bunny*
Burningham, John	*Mr. Gumpy's Outing*
Burningham, John	*The Rabbit*
Carle, Eric	*Do You Want to Be My Friend?*
Carle, Eric	*My Very First Book of Colors*
Carle, Eric	*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
Crews, Donald	*Parade*
Crews, Donald	*Truck*
Flack, Marjorie	*Ask Mr. Bear*
Gag, Wanda	*ABC Bunny*
Galdone, Paul	*Three Billy Goats Gruff*
Ginsberg, Mirra	*Good Morning Chick*
Hill, Eric	*Good Morning Baby*
Hutchins, Pat	*One Hunter*
Kalan, Robert	*Blue Sea*
Kraus, Robert	*Whose Mouse Are You?*
Krauss, Ruth	*Carrot Seed*
Martin, Bill	*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*
Peek, Merle	*Roll Over!*
Rice, Eve	*Benny Makes a Cake*
Tafuri, Nancy	*Early Morning in the Barn*
Wheeler, Cindy	*Marmalade's Nap*
Wildsmith, Brian	*Brian Wildsmith's ABC*
Williams, Garth	*Baby Farm Animals*
Winter, Jeanette	*Hush Little Baby*
Zemach, Margot	*Hush Little Baby*

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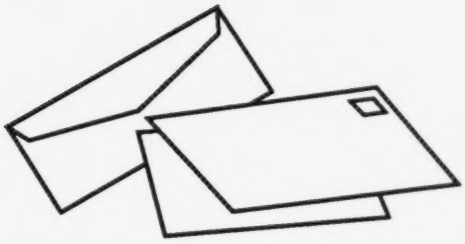

Resource List—Position Words

Children entering kindergarten should be able to use the following words to correctly place objects in relation to each other. These words should be in his or her listening and speaking vocabularies as well.

pairs
some
many
few
more
less
most
least
whole
part
almost
all
half
as many as
soft
loud
first
next
last
sideways

forward
left
right
beginning
middle
ending
often
never
always
matches
open
closed
zero
none
every
equal
in order
several
alike
different

backward
top
bottom
through
over
under
away (from)
close (to)
near
far
next to
beside
inside
outside
around
between
first
second
third

same
last
in front of
behind
before
after
on the side
above
on the corner
below
on
off
up
down
in
out
middle
center
across

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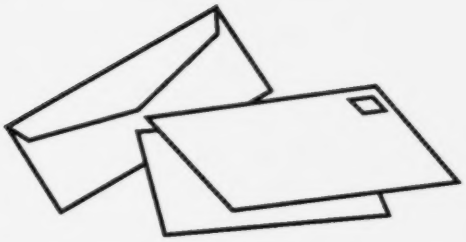

Props for Imaginative Play

The following household objects can be used in a variety of ways as props for many kinds of games and imaginative activities. For example, a piece of string can become a cowboy's lasso, a cardboard box can become a knight's castle, and a tin can can become a cannon on a pirate ship.

string
box
bowl
spoons
shirt
buttons
bags
crayons
sticks
stuffed animal
tin can
cotton
bottles
forks
hat
newspapers
purses
pencil
telephone book
suitcase
drawer
egg carton
macaroni
couch
rug remnant
lunch box
comb
sheet
mattress
paper clip
plant
spools
rice
table
milk carton
hanger
brush
shoe
basket

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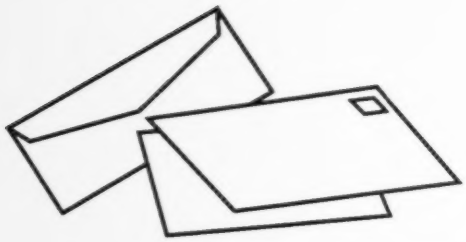

Coordination

Coordination is the ability to move one's body in a controlled manner—walking, hopping, skipping, balancing.

Let your child crawl over, under, and around chairs or tables.
Play "Mother May I." Use running, hopping, crawling, and jumping skills in the game.
When going for walks with your child, ask him or her to walk backward or sideways.
Have your child run in place to music or while you count to 10.
Face your child and hold his or her hands. Jump together while counting to 10.
Jump forward and backward over a line or crack.
Do jumping-jack exercises.
Lay a rope on the floor. Have your child walk along it without falling off.
Run on tiptoes. Stand on tiptoes and count to 10.
Play "Simon Says." Use directions that include the terms *left* and *right*.
Practice naming the parts of the body.
Sort left and right gloves or left and right shoes.
Bounce a ball to your child and have him or her catch and bounce it back.
Give a series of directions such as "hop on one foot 3 times and then turn around."
Hop over a rope as it swings back and forth.
Practice walking along a line. Then walk along the same line with eyes closed.
Teach skipping by having the child jump forward on the right foot and then bring the left foot up to the right.
Skip in patterns such as circles or figure eights.
Practice bouncing a ball. How many times will it bounce in 15 seconds?
Throw a beanbag to your child. If your child catches it, give him or her a direction such as "jump 3 times."
Use a two-by-four as a balance beam. Have your child walk along it with arms out or clasped behind the body.
On a balance beam, have your child walk to the center, kneel on one knee, rise, and walk to the end.

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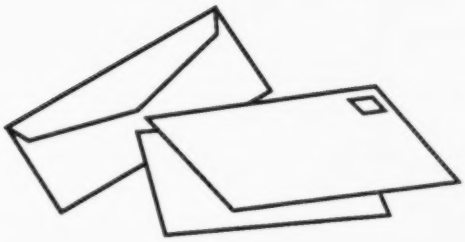

Resources for Parents

The following books are particularly useful for the parents of young children. You may wish to obtain one or more of them at your local library or bookstore. They should provide you and your children with many hours of learning and enjoyment.

Anderson, Paul	*Storytelling with the Flannel Board*
Christenberry, Mary Anne	*Can Piaget Cook?*
Daniels, Joan M.	*Fun with Action Stories*
Graham, Terry Lynn	*Fingerplays and Rhymes for Always and Sometimes*
Grayson, Marion	*Let's Do Fingerplays*
Karnes, Merle B.	*Early Childhood Resource Book*
Leitlin, Patty	*A Song Is a Rainbow*
Moyer, Joan (ed.)	*Selective Educational Equipment and Materials for School and Home*
Short, Pat	*Totalaction*
Singer, Dorothy & Jerome Singer	*Games and Activities to Foster Imaginative Play in Young Children*
Stangl, Jean	*Paper Stories*
Trender, Barbara	*Child's Play: An Activities and Materials Handbook*

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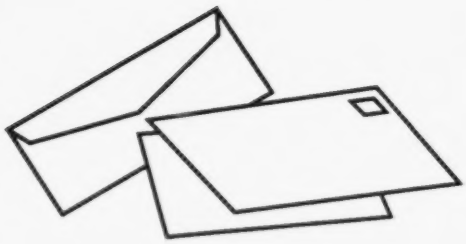

Language

Language is the ability to express oneself verbally.

After reading a story, act out the parts.

Ask your child to retell a story in his or her own words.

Name an animal and tell your child to describe it.

Staple some papers together and let your child dictate a story to you. Then let him or her illustrate the pages. As you write the story, talk about letters and words that are the same.

Your child is learning the names of many things. Make collections and label them (rocks, leaves, animal pictures).

Make a paper-bag puppet and let your child make up things for it to say.

Practice saying tongue twisters.

Using a play telephone, call your child and "chat" with him or her.

Ask your child information about himself or herself and have him or her answer in complete sentences.

Show your child a number of objects and have him or her tell three things to describe what he or she feels.

Choose a category such as toys. Have your child name as many things as possible that would fit that category.

Play word games. For example, "I am thinking of a word that tells how you feel when you are hurt."

Read a poem to your child. Ask him or her to repeat the words that rhyme.

Ask "what if" questions. For example, "What if we lived on the moon?"

Pantomime some action and then have your child describe it in words.

After watching a television program, ask your child to describe what happened in it.

Read stories without pictures to your child. It will develop his or her imagination.

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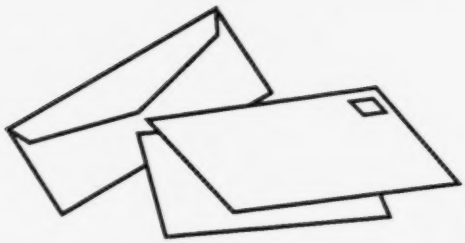

Speaking Activities

Provide your child with many opportunities to speak and be heard and you will be helping him or her develop self-confidence and expand reading and listening vocabularies. The following activities are a few of the many you and your child can participate in daily.

- Exchange lots of riddles with your child. Make up your own, too.
- Talk about how things taste, smell, feel, sound, or look.
- Begin a story and let your child finish it. Then reverse roles.
- Ask your child to give you a set of directions to follow.
- Have your child explain how two objects are similar or different.
- Ask your child to sing a favorite song.
- Discuss a photo or magazine picture with your child.
- Have your child make up a story about a pet or a friend.
- Make some simple puppets and have your child put on a play.
- Ask your child to tell you about a picture he or she has drawn.
- Encourage lots of discussions at the dinner table.
- Use a toy telephone to talk with your child.
- Be sure to have your child share his or her day with you.
- When traveling, have your child talk about the things you see.
- Have your child make up stories to record or write down.
- Have your child retell a favorite story.

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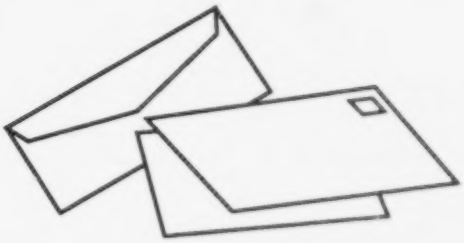

Field Trips for Parents and Children

It is essential to prepare your child for these experiences by helping him or her think of questions to ask while on the field trip. It is equally important to discuss the experience afterwards. You may want to have your child dictate a "thank you" note or draw a picture to remember the event. The following is a list of places you and your child might want to visit.

stores (grocery, department, hardware, drug, book, music, pet, nursery, farm equipment)
library
park
museum
circus
fair
concert, recital, or ballet
hospital
fire station
restaurant
train station
bus station
parade
beauty shop or barbershop
bank
hotel or motel
post office
dry cleaner
zoo
newspaper publisher
farm
orchard
ranch
service station
hatchery
shopping center
stable
sewage treatment plant
harbor
warehouse
garage
radio or TV station
ranger station

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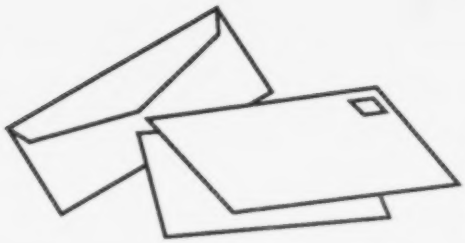

Resource List—Categorization

Children entering kindergarten should be able to identify and name objects in the following categories. They should also be able to tell the name of the category in which such objects would be found.

numbers
furniture
food
fruit
vegetables
meat
toys
shapes
body parts
clothing
farm animals
utensils used for eating
homes
holidays
jobs
desserts
musical instruments
signs
senses
letters
money
things used for writing
things used for cleaning
things used for measuring
things used for cooking
seasons
colors
ways to travel
pets
zoo animals
jewelry
kinds of stores
community helpers
tools
drinks
containers
reading material (newspapers, books)

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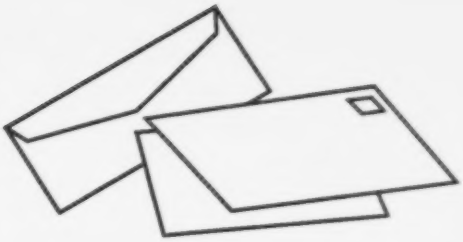

TV Tips

Well over 95 percent of the homes in this country have TVs. Although watching TV is a form of recreation, it should not be the only form. Rather, its use should be monitored very carefully, especially in homes with young children. You may wish to consider some of the following tips in planning TV time for your youngsters.

- Cut down on the amount of TV your child watches (the average child watches 24–53 hours per week).
- Watch TV *with* your child and take time to talk about the characters and actions.
- Talk about the similarities and differences in characters.
- Take time each day to share thoughts and stories with your child with the TV off.
- Encourage your child to talk about TV programs, including what he or she liked or disliked.
- Occasionally turn off the sound. Ask your child to imagine and then describe what the characters may be saying.
- Encourage your child to listen to stories or plays on radio (for example, Public Broadcasting stations) and note any similarities or differences between TV and radio.
- Ask your child questions such as "What might happen next?" "Why did the character do that?" or "How would you have handled that situation?"
- Plan one day each week for the entire family to get together with no TV.

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Parent Letters for Early Learning

Dear Preschool Caregivers,

PARENT LETTERS FOR EARLY LEARNING is a real time-saving resource that will help you accomplish a major goal of your early childhood program—communicating with parents about the total development of their youngsters.

PARENT LETTERS FOR EARLY LEARNING

- offers research-tested activities and projects to facilitate the academic and social development of preschoolers
- promotes an active, positive relationship between parents and their young children
- develops the skills necessary for future success both at home and at school
- provides activities that fit naturally into family life

Send these letters home just as they are or incorporate them into your own newsletters. They're easy to manage in any preschool setting. **PARENT LETTERS FOR EARLY LEARNING** is carefully designed to be easy, convenient, and meaningful!

Sincerely,

Tony + Mary

Anthony Fredericks, co-author of the popular Letters to Parents: Over 200 Ideas for Building Reading Skills, Grades 1–6, is Assistant Professor of Education at York College in Pennsylvania. Dr. Fredericks is a recipient of the Innovative Teaching Award from the Pennsylvania State Education Association, former Chairperson of the Parents and Reading Committee of the International Reading Association, and the "Parent Talk" columnist for Teaching K–8 magazine.

Mary Brigham is the Language Arts and Early Childhood Supervisor for Fort Bragg Schools in North Carolina. Ms. Brigham holds an M.Ed. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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